

Message Text

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ACTION IO-14

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R 112123Z JUN 74

FM AMEMBASSY PANAMA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 883

AMCONSUL GENEVA

C O N F I D E N T I A L PANAMA 3342

GENVEA FOR ILO

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: ELAB, ILO, PINS

SUBJECT: TORRIJOS REVERSES DECISION TO RECOGNIZE BANK
WORKERS'S UNION

REF: PANAMA A-79, APRIL 24, 1974 (NOTAL)

1. IN LATE MARCH, PANAMANIAN CHIEF OF GOVERNMENT GENERAL OMAR TORRIJOS GAVE EDIL ARTEGOITIA, AN INTERNATIONAL TRADE SECRETARIAT (ITS) AND INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF COMMERCIAL, CLERICAL AND TECHNICAL EMPLOYEES (FIET) REPRESENTATIVE, WHAT THE LATTER UNDERSTOOD AS AN EXPLICIT COMMITMENT TO EXTEND LEGAL RECOGNITION TO PANAMA'S ONLY BANK EMPLOYEES' UNION (REFAIR). THE GOP HAS AVOIDED GRANTING RECOGNITION TO THE FIET AFFILIATED UNION SINCE SEPTEMBER 1972 OUT OF RELUCTANCE TO DISTURB THE HIGHLY FAVORABLE BANKING CLIMATE. UPON HIS RETURN TO PANAMA LAST WEEK, ARTEGOITIA WAS REPORTEDLY PERSONALLY INFORMED BY TORRIJOS THAT THE GOP WOULD NOT GRANT LEGAL RECOGNITION (PERSONERIA JURIDICA) TO THE UNION--AT LEAST NOT PRIOR TO THE ILO JUNE MEETING--AND THAT, IF IT WISHED, THE ITS COULD CARRY OUT ITS EARLIER THREAT TO RAISE THE MATTER WITH THE ILO.

2. TORRIJOS REPORTEDLY SAID THAT HE HAD BEEN TOO OCCUPIED WITH THE BANANA EXPORT TAX ISSUE TO ARRANGE
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RECOGNITION AND THAT, IN ANY EVENT, HE HAD RECEIVED A GREAT

DEAL OF PRESSURE FROM THE BANKING COMMUNITY. HE APPARENTLY GAVE NO INDICATION, HOWEVER, WHETHER HIS CURRENT STANCE SHOULD BE SEEN AS TEMPORARY OR PERMANENT.

3. COMMENT: ARTEGOITIA DISCUSSED THE MATTER WITH THE AIDLF CPD, WHO STRONGLY ADVISED HIM NOT TO HAVE THE ISSUE RAISED IN GENEVA LEST HE WISHED TO SEE FIET DEAD IN PANAMA FOR THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE. WHILE TORRIJOS' COMMITMENT TO RECOGNIZE THE BANK UNION MAY HAVE BEEN LESS EXPLICITLY THAN WE HAD BEEN LED TO BELIEVE, IT IS EVIDENT THAT THE GOP CONTINUES TO FEEL THAT THE INFLUX OF FOREIGN BANKING INTO PANAMA--TO WHICH IT ATTACHES GREAT IMPORTANCE--IS HIGHLY SENSITIVE TO ANY PROSPECTS OF LABOR TROUBLES. WITH REGARD TO THE POSSIBILITY OF THE ISSUE BEING RAISED IN GENEVA, ONE MEMBER OF PANAMA'S FOUR-MAN DELEGATION TO THE ILO MEETING IS KNOWN TO BE SENSITIVE TO THE UNION'S PLIGHT. JULIO CESAR PINZON, THE SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE RADICAL CHRISTIAN CENTRAL ISTMENA DE TRABAJADORE (CIT), HAS SHOWN ON NUMEROUS OCCASIONS A SURPRISING READINESS TO ATTACK GOP ECONOMIC POLICY AND TO INSIST ON LABOR'S RIGHT TO AN EXISTENCE INDEPENDENT OF GOVERNMENT CONTROL. IT IS NOT EXPECTED, HOWEVER, THAT PINZON WOULD TAKE ANY PUBLIC POSITION AT GENEVA WHICH COULD EMBARRASS THE GOP (IN THE UNLIKELY EVENT THAT FIET SHOULD RAISE THE ISSUE.)
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